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JACK ANDERSON

Polish Party Voluptuary Lived High

One of the important causes of Poland's quiet revolution was the suspicion that Communist Party bigshots were living like czars while the people were going hungry.

The most flagrant voluptuary of all, apparently, was Maciej Szczepanski, who ran Poland's state radio and television industry before his downfall last year. He is in prison awaiting trial for corruption and if prosecutors use all the evidence they have on him, the trial should be an eye-popper.

Unlike the comical commissars in "Ninotchka," Szczepanski didn't have to travel to Gay Paree to be lured into a life of hedonistic decadence. He had the poor taste to flaunt his stolen wealth in front of the home folks.

Details of the Marxist millionaire's "dolce vita" are listed in a page of transcript smuggled out after a closed-door meeting of the Naczelna Izba Kontroli (NIK), the Polish Communist Party's powerful oversight committee. From the document, reviewed by my associate Jack Mitchell, here is the lowdown on Szczepanski's Faroukian lifestyle, which was subsidized by an apparently unlimited expense account:

- While Polish peasants were reduced to standing in line for hours for rations of butter, Szczepanski had use of a 16-acre farm worth a half-million dollars.

- Meat rationing and long lines at the butcher shop were no problem for the media commissar. He had access to his own slaughterhouse, which apparently produced prime cuts for him and other party VIPs.

- Various villas made available to Szczepanski included a chalet in Poland's most exclusive vacation area, a 23-room palace that cost \$30,000 a year to maintain, a safari residence in Nairobi, a couple of "love nest" apartments in Warsaw and a villa complete with four live-in prostitutes and a glass-bottomed swimming pool.

- The people's radio-TV mogul had three private airplanes, a helicopter, seven cars and two yachts. Like his capitalist counterparts, Szczepanski found the yachts an expensive luxury. To equip one he allegedly diverted \$10,000 that was supposed to have bought medicine for a health center.

- Next to the disgraced official's office, investigators uncovered 900 cassettes of pornographic films, some featuring Polish actors and actresses.

- Szczepanski and his fellow libertines in the media rested up from exertions at health spas with sauna baths and masseuses — at state expense.

- Six Szczepanski associates were reportedly caught with state documents trying to escape from Poland in one of his yachts. A military patrol boat nabbed them.

NIK officials have promised reforms in the media industry that Szczepanski ran largely for his profit.

The closely held party record of Szczepanski's transgressions has been authenticated by diplomatic sources and is in U.S. intelligence files. How much of the lurid evidence will be brought out at his trial is not clear. The magnitude of his thievery may simply be too embarrassing for public exposure, even by a reform government that hopes to persuade the Polish people it is conscientiously trying to clean house.